

Badboy 78

Chapter 78

### **You broke my heart first**

Ben is still not picking my calls. My mood is not any better as I flip the pancakes. I want to march to his house, pull him by his ear and kiss him after shouting at him for putting me through this stress.

I dish the pancakes into two plates and squirt some syrup onto only my plate. Mum likes hers free of any toppings.

The bell rings as I set the kettle to boil, Mum's head pokes into the kitchen. She mouths, "Get the door."

She disappears before my reply. We have been busy sorting out our boxes, some of which we are yet to unpack because no one wants to go through the stress of repacking when it's time to leave. I grab a carton of fruit juice from the fridge, set it on the tray with the plates I carry to the dining room. I am famished.

I need strength for the conversation I will be having with Ben. After breakfast, my next destination is his house. I wrench the door open before the bell rings again and my breath slams into my chest. He came.

"Benny."

The miniature Ben beside him screams, "Tessa!"

Asher launches into my arms, causing both of us to stagger. My eyes remain on the handsome boy at the door, he doesn't return my smile but I'm too glad to see him to be bothered by his attitude. My Benny.

Ben steps inside. I hold my breath as he looks around the living room. There are some boxes yet to be carried inside, Mum will do it herself. He passes me one glance and looks away to Asher who's clinging to me. I run my hand through Asher's hair and smile. At least, one of the Carter brothers still loves me.

"Hey, Champ."

“Hey, Tessa.” He bats his long lashes and I giggle. He’s so innocent.

The corners of his beautiful eyes crinkle when his lips spread into a smile. Why can’t Benny smile at me like this? I guide Asher to the couch and plop down beside him. We hear Mum’s voice from upstairs. She has been on that phone call since I got out of bed and I am almost sorry that the plans didn’t work out.

“Benny said you’re traveling,” Asher tells me.

I look to Ben again. He’s staring at his feet but I know he can hear us. “Yeah...” I palm Asher’s cheeks and make funny faces at him. He sticks his tongue out. “But there has been a change of plans.” His eyes light up with interest and Ben shoots me a look as my lips hover above Asher’s ear, “I’m not leaving today.”

Asher’s eyes widen, I slap a hand over his mouth so he doesn’t spill. “Don’t tell Ben,” I whisper. He nods and makes a criss-cross sign across his heart. I glance at his outfit for the first time. “Are you going out?”

“Yeah.” He spares his brother a long glance. Ben doesn’t hide the fact he was staring at us, this time, he glares at me. “We are going to Josef’s house.” I think Josef is their stepfather. His smile grows. If he likes Josef, maybe he isn’t so bad. “Do you want to come with us? Mummy wants to meet Benny’s girlfriend.”

Ben scoots to his feet. “No. Mummy never said that,” he says as he drags Asher away from me. He looks everywhere but at me and murmurs, “We wanted to wish you a safe journey. Have a nice flight, Gracie.”

Ben’s thoughtfulness renders me speechless for a moment. It’s the little things like this that makes me fight so much for us to be together. The anger building inside me crumples and I force myself to my feet.

“Wait,” I call out to him when he takes the first step in the direction of the door. He stops. Asher throws me a wary look over his shoulder and I flash him a reassuring smile. I slide a hand over my face. It’s okay to be nervous. I bridge the gap, leaving only an inch of space between us. “Can we talk?”

Ben shakes his head. “Please,” I add. Asher retracts his hand from him, I give him a thumbs up and he grins. I love that guy. “Benny.” I stop at his front and curl a finger under his jaw. His dark circles are too telling, he didn’t sleep well. He allows me hold him and I slide my arms around him. “You didn’t pick my calls.”

Still rigid in my embrace, he answers, "I was upset."

From my peripheral view, I see Mum coming down the stairs. She sees both of us and pauses. I send her a grateful smile when she takes Asher with her, leaving me and Ben to sort our messy feelings. He's not leaving without getting a proper explanation from me. And I want to meet his mummy and even Josef.

Holding him at an arm's length, I pout. His stoic expression doesn't change and I almost laugh.

"You promised you wouldn't be mad."

Ben frowns. "That was an impossible promise." He holds my gaze captive and guilt rolls down my body. I sniff when he backs away from me to sit where Asher and I were previously seated. "You tricked me."

I stand there for a little too long before sitting on the armrest. "Are you still mad?" His chest heaves, he runs his hands over his knees and shrugs. I occupy the spot by his side and take his hand. "Benny. Please, don't be mad at your Gracie." Tears well up my eyes without falling. "I didn't know how to tell you."

The silence until he answers is heavy and uncomfortable, I shift in my seat with my glassy eyes focused on the floor. He pulls his hand from my grasp and my heart lurches against my ribcage. We can fix this.

Ben pecks me and a tear rolls down my cheek. His fingertip brushes my lip. "I'm not mad." I take this as a sign to sit on his lap and his hand reaches behind to steady me. "Just sad, babe. I'll miss you every day."

Sadness darkens his gaze, he puts his emotions on display and my heart hurts for him. I press my forehead to his and take his hand, brushing his knuckles with my lips. I want to be here with him too.

"You don't have to miss me every day." His eyes narrow but he waits for me to finish. "I'm not leaving today. There has been a change of plans." So many emotions flash across his face, I recognise relief and my chest constricts. His arms tighten around me as I tell him everything Mum told me. "Maybe March."

"March? It's so close." Almost two months away. He pecks my lips. "Is that what you told Asher?"

“Partly. I wanted to tell you first.”

He grins. His phone rings before he replies and he lets out a groan. “My mum’s calling.”

Asher’s words flow back to me, I slide my hands into the pockets of his coat. “You’re going there?” On a heavy sigh, he nods. “Josef is your stepfather?” Another nod. “Do you want me to come with you?” He hesitates and I slip my hand into his. “I don’t mind. Mum doesn’t mind either. She was going to call you.”

That piques his interest. He lifts a thick brow. I should help him trim it. “Why?”

“Because you broke her baby’s heart.” My gaze lowers to his chest, I bite my lips and finally let out the words I have been holding on. “I was at your house when I called. I was so scared and angry and sad.”

His eyes soften as his fingers migrate to my jaw. Pushing down my guard, I close my hands around his wrist. Our eyes meet for a brief moment and he palms my face. Staring at me with a raw intensity that makes me feel vulnerable, his lips brush mine in a gentle, almost kiss and he pulls back to smile at me.

“You broke my heart first,” he whispers.

“Sorry.”

Ben chuckles. “It’s okay, Gracie.” Hugging me to himself, he whispers, “We will figure it out.”

His ringtone cuts through the air, he frowns but answers. I head to the dining table to get my breakfast. Mum’s own is missing, she’s probably sharing it with Asher. Throughout the duration of the call, he gives monotone responses to his mum and I nibble on my soaked pancake slowly to keep from chastising him.

We haven’t spoken about his mum since that day, I’m not sure his relationship with her has progressed. He doesn’t have bad things to say about her but he doesn’t have good things to say either. Ben is my boyfriend so I’ll pick his side but the fact Asher likes her and Josef has my curiosity hitting a new level.

“Are you sure you want to follow me?” he asks as soon as the call ends.

I cross my legs and nod with my mouth full of pancake. “You don’t want me to come with you?”

He wipes his palms on his legs. “It’s not that, babe. Of course I want you to meet them.” I finish the slice of pancake and start on another. He refuses to join me. His loss. “But I have never brought a girl home.”

My heart flips. I slide the empty plate to the stool beside the couch.

“There’s always a first time for everything.”

“Always is.” He brings my hand to his lips. “I missed you, Gracie.” His eyes shine with vulnerability. I sit astride him and my hands slide into his hair. His head falls back. “Babe, I wish you didn’t have to go.”

Rubbing my nose against his, I murmur, “Me too.”

We will discuss my school choice later but for now, I let myself be comforted by his presence.